

# USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

## Here's How We're Working With IRS To Validate Eligibility Of Producers Who Seek USDA Benefits

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

USDA and the Internal Revenue Service are teaming up to ensure that high-income agricultural producers who request benefits from the Department meet the income eligibility limits that were spelled out in the 2008 Farm Bill. This initiative is to ensure the integrity of farm payment programs and will impact the program delivery efforts of USDA employees located at headquarters and field offices across the country.

"It's part of our effort to make sure that, by improving coordination between federal departments, we spend our tax dollars wisely and we don't waste valuable resources," explained **Candy Thompson**, Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs in the Farm Service Agency.

She pointed out that, according to a recent report by the Government Accountability Office, between 2003 and 2006 USDA made nearly \$50 million in payments to recipients who weren't eligible to receive those payments.

"So this initiative is designed to prevent such errors," Thompson emphasized.

**Lynn Tjeerdsma**, FSA's Assistant Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, explained that under this initiative, individuals

who are seeking benefits from USDA will be required to sign a document giving the IRS permission to verify that they meet income eligibility for that assistance. "That way," he noted, "we're making sure that farm program payments are only provided to eligible producers. And that's per the rules which Congress established."

"But," clarified **Brad Karmen**, Assistant to the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs in FSA, "FSA county employees will *not* look at a producer's tax returns." Instead, he explained, IRS will scan its own tax records, and will then notify USDA that an applicant may not be eligible because that applicant may have exceeded the income tests spelled out in the 2008 Farm Bill.

"Once we get that list from the IRS, we will give producers the opportunity to provide us with evidence of their income."

"And," Karmen underscored, "we'll work carefully to ensure that the privacy of the producer is protected throughout the process."

Tjeerdsma pointed out that it's already USDA's current practice to audit a sample of agricultural producers each year to verify compliance with eligibility rules. "This new initiative," he

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"Don't put your backpacks or your shoes on countertops or tables," advises FSIS's **Ardith Alford** (left). "No, no, don't listen to her! I like to play in those locations where you're going to put your food!" replies '**Germie**' (right). Alford and 'Germie'—who, when not in costume, is FSIS's **Mahmood Ramzan**—are performing a skit about good food safety techniques before a class of first-graders in Fayetteville, AR. They came up with the character of 'Germie' to get their food safety message across more easily to a younger audience. Now Germie has been added to the arsenal of USDA's 'special characters' who help spread the word about USDA mission-related areas of concern such as food safety, nutrition, and resource conservation. Note the story on page 4.

## This Little Pin Conveys A Pretty Important Message

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

You say you want to ask about the "Ask Me About USDA" pin? Go ahead, ask. Now here's the answer.

There is this pin that's oval in shape, 1.25 inches in length, attaches to a lapel by means of a tiny magnet instead of a safety

pin, and contains the words "Ask Me About USDA" that encircle above the USDA logo that, itself, is in green and blue 'earth tones.' The pin has been seen gracing the lapels and collars of a number of USDA employees at headquarters and field locations, including the suit lapel of Secretary **Tom Vilsack**.

"I came up with the idea of this pin about a year ago," explained **Shirley Harrington-Watson**, Program Manager for

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# Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

**D**ear Fellow Employees, When the American people elected President **Barack Obama** they sent a clear message that they were looking for a more responsible government focused on transparency, accountability, and integrity. On April 20 I attended the first meeting of President Obama's Cabinet and he reiterated his expectation that we run an efficient government that uses taxpayer's dollars wisely.

At the meeting, President Obama challenged me and the rest of his cabinet members to identify \$100 million in cost avoidance measures over the next 90 days. All across America, families are being forced to make hard choices and it's time their government did the same. But this \$100 million is just a beginning. Here at USDA and across the federal government, we need to review every program and processes to see what's working and what isn't. By doing this, we'll save taxpayer dollars, reduce the deficit, and increase our efficiency. I am particularly interested in ensuring efficient use of the funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

One of the first things I did after the inauguration was to ask my staff to submit weekly reports of cost-avoidance measures we could implement at USDA. And I am proud to say that already we have identified savings of nearly \$30 million annually:

- USDA worked with the U.S. Treasury Department to develop a system to identify potential fraud and improper payments in farm programs, which could avoid payments of up to \$16 million each year.

- We will move 1,500 USDA employees from seven locations into a single facility, saving \$62 million over a 15-year lease term.
- Rural Development has replaced some in-person trainings with Internet trainings with a projected annual savings of \$1.3 million.
- And the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Mission Area has found approximately \$1.6 million in savings through elimination of unnecessary travel, reduced postage, and reorganization of existing processes.

These, and measures taken by other agencies, are terrific first steps that I want to applaud. But in the days and months ahead we need to do more. Everyone has a personal responsibility to be conscious every day of the ways you can conserve taxpayer dollars. It could be as simple as turning off the lights when you leave a room, or reducing your use of office supplies. Maybe it will involve larger strategic thinking about ways to create efficiencies in your program, agency, or mission area. No matter how big or small, I need everyone's help in this effort to identify, eliminate, or modify department programs and systems that aren't working well.

These past months have marked an exciting start to my tenure here at USDA. The work we do here will be critical to steering this nation out of the difficult economic straits we are in and in earning the confidence of the nation we serve. As we come to work every day, let us be mindful of the challenges that this country faces and conduct ourselves so that we live up to the expectations of the American people as we work to achieve our goals. ■

## *USDA Benefits...continued from pg. 1*

said, "will enable us to better monitor program participant eligibility."

He added that this initiative will begin when a memorandum of understanding has been negotiated and signed by USDA and the U.S. Department of the Treasury. IRS is a part of the Treasury Department.

Karmen advised that, at this point, FSA county offices have not been provided any additional instruction or changes in current procedure as a result of this initiative.

"Look," Thompson noted, "like any program that has income eligibility tests, the federal government has a responsibility to verify that only those who are eligible are the ones receiving benefits."

"This joint effort between USDA and the IRS is a step toward better and more targeted verification activities that will reduce erroneous payments." ■

## *This Little Pin...continued from pg. 1*

USDA-wide Conference Coordination within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. "I wanted to make sure that when our USDA employees are engaged in such mission-oriented activities as attending conferences or staffing USDA exhibit booths, they can be easily identified as employees of this Department."

"But beyond that," she added, "I wanted that identification to help break the ice—in other words, to lend itself to—and even encourage and invite—questions from the public to our employees about USDA's programs and services."

Accordingly, last summer Harrington-Watson worked with a St. Louis-based minority-owned company to coordinate the design and production of the pin. "My division was able to get them produced cost-effectively," she underscored.

She noted that the pins made their debut on the lapels of USDA

employees in September 2008 when several employees staffed a USDA booth during back-to-back conferences in Washington, DC of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Institute.

**Renee Allen**, Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, said that the pin gained more visibility at the Feb. 12, 2009 dedication of USDA's "People's Garden" located on the corner of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC. The Jan.-Feb. 2009 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about that dedication.

Allen explained that **Robin Heard**, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, arranged for Harrington-Watson to attend that dedication. "So I took the opportunity to personally attach a pin to the Secretary's lapel myself," Harrington-Watson recounted. "He told me that he thought the pin was an excellent marketing tool and that he

wished he had a supply for his suits. So I personally hand-carried several dozen pins to his office later that day."

Regarding additional dissemination of the pins to employees around the country, Harrington-Watson noted that she sports the pin on her lapel at monthly meetings she attends with employees from USDA program agencies and staff offices. "Several of those employees have expressed an interest in ordering the pins for their headquarters and field employees," she said.

One additional development about employees wearing the pin: She observed that the pin has encouraged employees to learn more about USDA, beyond the scope of their specific work.

"When USDA employees wear the 'Ask Me About USDA' pin, we find that people really take notice," Harrington-Watson affirmed.

"And that's the point." ■



# Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

## Fighting Wildfires:

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** welcomed Australian Prime Minister **Kevin Rudd** at an event at USDA in honor of the wildfire firefighters who were recently deployed to aid Australia during its wildfire season. The event was held on March 26 in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC.

Rudd thanked the U.S. Government for its support in fighting the "Black Saturday" bush fires of February 2009 which destroyed 2,029 homes and killed 210 people in the state of Victoria, Australia.

**Tony Johnson**, the Training Manager for the Forest Service's Redmond (Oregon) Smokejumpers, was one of two Forest Service employees who participated in the event. He was also one of the 73 individuals who provided firefighting assistance to Victoria. **Eric Bush**, the Training Manager for FS's Malheur Rappel Crew in John Day, OR, who also attended the event, said that 38 of the 73 individuals were from FS, and the remaining 35 were from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Bush added that the deployed U.S. personnel included three Burned Area Emergency Response Teams, 11 Incident Management Team members, a 20-person Interagency Suppression Crew, and three Liaisons.

"American and Australian firefighters have supported each other for almost 10 years," Johnson noted. "In fact, Australia has provided wildfire assistance to the U.S. in 2002, 2003, and 2006, while the U.S. provided wildfire assistance to Australia in 2003, 2007, and most recently this past February."

## Teaming Up:

USDA recently teamed up with Sesame Workshop and the National WIC Association to help children and their families have healthier options and encourage them to make healthy habits a part of their daily routines. In the process, that included some face-time between Secretary **Tom Vilsack** and "Sesame Street's" **Cookie Monster**.

Vilsack announced a partnership with those two entities at the 19th Annual National WIC Association Leadership Conference held in Washington, DC on March 10. "WIC is proven effective at helping low-income mothers get their infants and children off to a healthy start, and through the \$500 million provided through the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009, USDA can further assist those nutritionally at risk," he said.

**Debbie Whitford**, Chief of the Policy and Program Development Branch for WIC in the Food and Nutrition Service, said that WIC—which is shorthand for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children and which is administered by FNS—is employing outreach kits containing a DVD and a storybook to help deliver child and family-friendly messages from the "Sesame Street" Muppets to aid in implementing the new WIC food packages. "Those new packages include more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and soy beverages," she said. The March-April 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about that change to the WIC food packages.

**Patty Davis**, Chief of the Program Analysis and Monitoring Branch for WIC in FNS, added that Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit organization behind public television's long-running "Sesame Street" TV show, while the National WIC Association is the non-profit education and advocacy voice of WIC.

Vilsack and Cookie Monster teamed up at the March 10 event—where Cookie Monster apparently wanted the record to reflect that "Me know cookies are a sometimes food, but me love to eat everything!"

## It's Now Online:

USDA is now making videos of its monthly "Diversity Lunch Series" available online. Previously, the Series was not available online, and information about the Series was publicized by word-of-mouth and generally confined to employees in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

The monthly "Diversity Lunch Series" began in February 2008 and is held at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. Upcoming programs include "No One's Excluded, White Males Included!" "Fido's for Freedom Assistance Dog Program: Changing the Lives of Persons with Disabilities," and "Career Need a Jump-Start? Join an Employee Organization!" The July-August 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about efforts, such as the Diversity Lunch Series, to reinvent diversity and inclusion in the USDA workplace.

**Elaine Ho**, Director of USDA's Office of Workplace Diversity and Inclusion, said that "We wanted to make sure that our field em-



Secretary **Tom Vilsack** poses with "Sesame Street" characters "**Cookie Monster**" (right) and "**Broccoli**" at the 19th Annual National WIC Association Leadership Conference held in Washington, DC on March 10.

—PHOTO BY KEN HAMMOND

ployees have easy access to the Diversity Lunch Series. So, in response to employee inquiries, we've been working to make videos of these programs available online to all of USDA."

Accordingly, Ho's office, which sponsors the Diversity Lunch Series, initiated a "Diversity Mailing List." **Lavinia Panizo**, Assistant to the Director of the Office of Workplace Diversity and Inclusion, explained that "By subscribing to that Diversity Mailing List, employees receive links to previous 'Diversity Lunch presentations' which they can view online. Some employees have then taken that a step further by hosting 'viewing sessions'—and then follow-up discussion groups—of the Diversity Lunch Series, in their field offices."

Panizo said that, to subscribe to the Diversity Mailing List—and thereby receive video links to the Diversity Lunch Series—send an e-mail to: [listserv@newsbox.usda.gov](mailto:listserv@newsbox.usda.gov). Then, in the body of the e-mail, type: "subscribe diversity" and "(your name)." Panizo added that, to date, "Over 250 USDA employees, from headquarters and field locations, have already subscribed to the Diversity Mailing List. So, getting your diversity fix is easy; all you have to do is sign up." ■

—RON HALL

# Employees *make these things happen*

## FOOD SAFETY

### Here's Yet Another 'Character' To Help Promote USDA's Message

USDA has a lot of 'special characters' to help it spread the word about such mission-related areas of concern as food safety, nutrition, and resource conservation. These USDA characters are often life-size, and include, alphabetically: **BAC, Paneco, Power Panther, Sammy Soil, S.K. Worm, Smokey Bear, Thermy, and Woodsy Owl.**

And now it's time to add one more 'special character' to the Department's arsenal. So, ladies and gentlemen, **HEEEERE'S GERMY!**

"Germey" was developed in October 2008 by **Mahmood Ramzan**—who at the time was the Deputy District Manager for the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Springdale District, based in Springdale, AR—and **Ardith Alford**—who at the time was one of FSIS's Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Officers for that district.

"We wanted to come up with a kid-friendly way to teach elementary school students basic food safety techniques such as effective hand-washing, proper food handling, and how to avoid cross contamination of food products," Alford recounted. "So we relied on a skit in which Ardith would describe good food safety techniques, and I—as Germey—would react negatively, since those techniques would literally eliminate my presence," Ramzan added.

"We thought that an actual costumed character would help the students to grasp the food safety concepts more easily."

Accordingly, Alford made the costume for Germey, which was a life-sized neon-green fleece costume containing large patches of

bright blue fur. "We wanted the costume to not be attractive to the kids—but also not intimidate them either. We *didn't* want it to be 'warm and fuzzy,'" she advised.

"It took me an entire weekend to make the costume," Alford recalled. "The hardest part was coming up with the face—which ended up including black furry eyebrows, large black eyes, and an open mouth with its red tongue hanging out."

Following a trial run by Ramzan and Alford of the skit—with Ramzan in costume—on a Saturday in December 2008, they made their stage debut the following Monday. Well, actually, the "stage" was a first-grade class in an elementary school in Fayetteville, AR.

Alford noted that during the skit Ramzan "really pulled out all the theatrics he could, including going down on one knee to beg to not be 'sent away' when kids wash their hands or clean off countertops. He'd shift from using a gruff voice to using a whiny voice whenever his character required a personality shift." Then at the end of the skit the students were shown a short video titled "Cough Etiquette," provided by FSIS's Office of Data Integration and Food Protection.

The students then demonstrated what they had learned through role-playing, plus they participated in a question and answer session, with prizes given for the best hand-washing procedures, knowledge of proper food storage and handling practices, and the best "practice cough." "The best cough means that you use your arm, not your hand, to cover your mouth from the spread of germs to others," Ramzan explained. "In other words, you should cough into a fabric."

The twosome then provided each child—and the teacher—with small gift bags containing food safety-themed paraphernalia.

Fast forward to April 2009, and Ramzan is now the Deputy District Manager of FSIS's Beltsville (MD) District, while Alford is now the Frontline Supervisor for FSIS's Tulsa, OK Circuit. So, does that mean that Germey has been retired?

"Definitely not," replied Alford. "It's not a problem to ship the 'Germey' costume to other FSIS offices which might want to use it," Ramzan added. In fact, Ramzan said that in February 2009 he shipped it—inexpensively, he pointed out—to an FSIS field office in Kinston, NC.

"When we ship it to another FSIS office," he affirmed, "we'll simply count on two other FSIS colleagues to perform the skit, with Germey as a central part of the gig." ■

—**RON HALL**



FSIS's **Ardith Alford** (left) and **Mahmood Ramzan**—who has since doffed his 'Germey' costume—interact with their audience of first-graders, following their skit about good food safety techniques.

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

### How We Provided TLC To A USDA Colleague In Afghanistan

"They Also Serve Who Sit And Wait."

That's an old adage that has applied, throughout history, to the folks back at the "home front" who provide support to kinfolk, friends, and others who are overseas, generally in times of conflict or other forms of hardship.

What follows is a story about how employees at a USDA state office recently provided support to a Departmental employee on tem-

porary assignment to Afghanistan—and the employee wasn't even from their office or their state.

**Bruce Dubee** is a Natural Resource Specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, based in Washington, DC. From February 2008 to February 2009 he served as a member of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan's Kunar Province. Part of his mission was to assist in reconstituting programs that improve the capacity of Afghan farmers and agricultural officials.

Actually, it's not all that unusual, these days, for USDA employees to serve on Provincial Reconstruction Teams. In fact, according to **Bud Eaton**, the Afghanistan PRT Coordinator in the Foreign Agricultural Service, as of April 24, 2009 USDA had 12 employees—from headquarters and field locations—participating in Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and 30 employees in PRTs in Iraq. Furthermore, FAS International Programs Specialist **Katya Caballero** said that

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# Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



**K**athleen Merrigan is USDA's Deputy Secretary.

Before rejoining USDA, from July 2001 until she was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Merrigan served as an Assistant Professor and Director of the Agriculture, Food and Environment Program at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Boston. In 2008 she was an expert consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome.

Merrigan served as Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service from 1999-2001. From 1994-99 she worked as a Senior Analyst for the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, a Washington, DC-based organization which promotes re-

search and education in sustainable agriculture. She was a Senior Staff Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry from 1987-92, where she worked as the Chief Science and Technology Advisor to [then] Chairman **Patrick Leahy** (D-VT). During that time she helped develop the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. She worked on pesticide issues as a Special Assistant to the Chief of Regulatory Affairs for the Texas Department of Agriculture, based in Austin, from 1986-87.

Merrigan served on USDA's National Organic Standards Board from 1995-99 and on the Department's Facilities Reform Commission from 1997-99.

**Chuck Conner**, USDA's previous Deputy Secretary, is now the President and CEO of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, based in Washington, DC. ■



**J**im Miller is USDA's Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services.

Before joining USDA, from September 2008 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Miller served as Chief of Staff for the National Farmers Union, based in Washington, DC. He worked as the Senior Analyst for Agriculture and Trade on the U.S. Senate Budget Committee from 2004-08. From 1999-2004 he was the Chief Economist for the National Farmers Union.

Miller served as President of the Washington, DC-based National Association of Wheat Growers in 1987, and was its Vice President for Government Relations from 1995-99. From 1994-95 he served as Co-Chairman of the Canada-U.S. Joint Commission on Grains,

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USDA employees have been serving on PRTs in Afghanistan since September 2003, and on PRTs in Iraq since June 2006. The May-June 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about USDA's program which coordinates those particular voluntary details to those two countries.

But the twist here is that a USDA field office initiated several unique measures to provide some TLC to a deployed USDA employee—who was not even one of their own.

**Bill Gradle** is NRCS's State Conservationist for Illinois, based in Champaign, IL. While serving on a detail to NRCS headquarters in Washington, DC during 2007 he worked with Dubee and struck up a friendship.

Then in February 2008 Dubee shipped out to Afghanistan on his detail. Like the soldiers he worked with, he kept in contact with friends, family, and coworkers through e-mail messages over the course of his year-long assignment. He included Gradle in those regular communiqués.

Gradle, in turn, began to consider what he and his office might be able to do to support Dubee, his fellow PRT members, and other soldiers based in Kunar. "Having worked with Bruce in DC, I guess I took a special interest in supporting him and his Team over there," Gradle recalled.

Accordingly, over the next several months Gradle and NRCS Illinois State Administrative Officer **Nancy Phalen** coordinated and or-

ganized local collections and supply drives for Dubee's Team and the soldiers they traveled with.

"I'd get big cardboard boxes," Phalen noted, "and write 'DONATIONS FOR OUR SOLDIERS' on them in big letters with a magic marker—and that got everyone's attention. We placed those boxes on the tables in our breakroom—and they'd start to fill up."

"We were able to donate badly needed items like socks, snacks, treats, magazines, books, personal hygiene items, playing cards, DVD movies, music CDs, and 'luxury items' that are hard to come by on a military installation in the desert."

The only limitation? Send nothing liquid or perishable. "As the boxes filled up," Gradle added, "we'd send out a quick e-mail in the office to remind everyone to get donations in."

With her husband **Bill Phalen** being a former Marine, and both involved with the local American Legion Post and Auxiliary, Phalen tapped in to local contacts there, who volunteered to cover all shipping costs.

Gradle noted that the NRCS Illinois State Office sent about 20 boxes to Dubee's camp over the past year.

According to Gradle, when the troops ultimately tried to thank Dubee, Dubee made it clear that the kudos belonged to the staffers of NRCS's Illinois State Office.

So Dubee wrote a letter to the command-

er of Dubee's camp in Kunar Asadabad, Afghanistan. In that letter he described the support provided by NRCS employees in Illinois. In turn, that commander sent Gradle a Certificate of Appreciation for their efforts, plus the U.S. flag that had flown over the camp in Kunar Asadabad on Aug. 16, 2008.

"We kept that flag folded," Gradle noted. "Then we placed it in an oak-and-glass case—and it's now proudly mounted on the wall of our State Office." ■

—**PAIGE BUCK**



*It's a long reach, but that's what it takes for NRCS's **Bill Gradle** (left) and **Nancy Phalen** to adjust the wall display in their office of a U.S. flag and a Certificate of Appreciation—both of which came from Afghanistan.—*

*PHOTO BY JODY CHRISTIANSEN*

a federal commission established to resolve grain trade issues between those two countries. For over 20 years, from 1974-95, he operated his family farm—a fourth-generation family farm—located in Garfield, WA.

**Mark Keenum**, the previous Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, now serves as the 19th President of Mississippi State University in Starkville, MS. That land-grant school was founded in 1878. ■



**Joe Leonard** is USDA's Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.

Before joining USDA, from January through March 2009 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Leonard served as the Senior Advisor to U.S. Rep. **Carolyn Kilpatrick** (D-MI). He was the Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus from 2007-09. From 2004-07 he served as

the Executive Director of the Black Leadership Forum, a Washington, DC-based consortium of 32 African American civil rights organizations.

Leonard served from 2000-04 as the Washington, DC Bureau Chief of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, which focuses on protecting and defending the civil rights of historically disadvantaged communities.

**Margo McKay**, the previous Assistant  
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## PROFILE PLUS More About: Jim Vogelsang



**U**SDA officially released the results of the 2007 Census of Agriculture on February 4, 2009. The January-February 2009 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about its findings.

But if one considers that official release to be Chapter 9 in the whole Agriculture Census process, then Chapter 1 of the formal process began back in October 2007—and it began with **Jim Vogelsang**.

Vogelsang is an Agricultural Statistician with the National Agricultural Statistics Service. He is based in Jeffersonville, IN as one of three NASS employees assigned to the National Processing Center, which is part of the Bureau of the Census within the U.S. Department of Commerce. In fact, he has been there for most of his federal career, following a childhood in Rantoul, IL, a B.S. degree in forestry from Southern Illinois University, and an M.S. degree in agricultural economics from Virginia Tech.

Vogelsang began his federal career as an Agricultural Statistician with the Census Bureau's [then] Agriculture Division in 1974, working on the 1974 Census of Agriculture. "Back then, the U.S. Census Bureau was responsible for the Census of Ag," he clarified. He later worked for the Census Bureau in Suitland, MD from 1978-79 until returning to Jeffersonville to work on the 1978 Census of Agriculture.

NASS took over the responsibility for the Agriculture Census from the Census Bureau in 1997, and Vogelsang was one of over 100 Census Bureau employees who were moved to NASS as part of that change. In 2009 he is completing his 35th year as a federal employee, and his eighth Agriculture Census.

So, what is his Ag Census work specifically? Vogelsang is the Processing Manager of NASS's component of the National Processing Center. "This means that I oversee such activities as the drafting, preparation, and printing of the Ag Census questionnaire—more formally known as the 'Census of Agriculture Report Form'," he explained. For the 2007 Census of Agriculture the long form of the questionnaire was 24 pages with 35 sections, and the short form was 12 pages with 16 sections.

He also oversees the labeling and mailing of those questionnaires to the would-be respondents. The questionnaires are mailed back to his office in Jeffersonville, where he and NASS and Census Bureau staffers review them for completeness, then electronically scan each page of each report form, then key the data from those scanned computer images. Then both the data and the scanned images are made available to agricultural statisticians at NASS head-

quarters in Washington, DC—where the information is computer edited and then ultimately reviewed by ag statisticians in 45 NASS Field Offices around the country. He underscored that throughout that collection and review process, the information is kept strictly confidential—and that protection is required by law.

"For this most recent Ag Census," he noted, "my office began our formal process in October 2007. Then on December 28, 2007 we mailed out 3.2 million questionnaires to farm and ranch operations in 50 states and Puerto Rico, and our requested response date was February 4, 2008. Then on January 14, 2008 we sent out a combination 'thank you if you've already responded/please respond if you haven't yet' postcard to that same audience of 3.2 million. On February 12, 2008 we sent the questionnaire to the estimated 1.3 million non-respondents to our initial mailing. Then on April 1, 2008 we sent out the questionnaire, for the third time, to those estimated 1.0 million individuals who had still not responded to our initial mailing." Therefore, he said, his office mailed a total of 8.7 million pieces of 2007 Census of Ag report forms or postcards. Plus, of the 3.2 million questionnaires in the initial mailout in December 2007, 2,735,000 were 24-page booklets, and 465,000 were 12-page booklets.

Vogelsang pointed out that the 2007 Census of Agriculture was the first time in which his office keyed the data from scanned images instead of from paper. "This is important because it was more efficient, since the keyer only had to look at those pages in the questionnaire that actually contained data." He added that "during my first Ag Census, my office's component of the whole process took 18 months. This time, my office's component took only six months."

So, with 35 years and eight Ag Censuses, is he thinking to retire soon? "I plan to retire when the Cubs win the World Series," he replied.

**Last Book Read:** "*Rebound Rules: The Art Of Success 2.0*," by **Rick Pitino** and **Pat Forde**.

**Last Movie Seen:** "*Duplicity*."

**Hobbies:** "Rooting for the Cubs takes up my summers, and rooting for University of Louisville basketball takes up my winters."

**Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me:** "Every day of the week I watch two episodes on TV of the old '*Andy Griffith Show*' from the 1960s. Go, **Barney!**"

**Priorities In The Months Ahead:** "At work, our plate is full with the other NASS surveys that we work on when we're not focused on the Census of Agriculture. At home, I'll keep dreaming about my secret ambition to own my own BBQ restaurant—which I've already mentally named after my nickname: 'The Rib King'." ■

—**RON HALL**



Secretary for Civil Rights, currently serves as a mediator in employee and domestic relations matters. ■



**D**ave White is the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

From 2002 until his selection for this position White served as NRCS's State Conservationist for Montana, based in Bozeman. In addition, between 2001 and 2008 he served on two details to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, where he helped craft the Conservation Title for both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. He also served on a detail from 1999-2001 as Director of Communications for the White House Task Force on Livable Communities, after having served from 1995-99 as Director of Communications for NRCS.

White served in a number of headquarters-based managerial positions for NRCS from 1990-94, after having worked as a Public Affairs Specialist for the agency in Washington, DC from 1986-89. He was Director of Public Affairs for the agency in South Carolina, based in Columbia, SC, from 1984-86. He began his full-time career with the agency as the state-level Director of Public Affairs in Missouri, based in Columbia, MO, in 1980.



FSIS Program Specialist **Beatrice Herbert** checks out the "Ask Me About USDA" pin she is wearing on her lapel. She said she has worn the pin since she got it last November. Note the story on page 1.—**PHOTO BY RENEE ALLEN**

**Arlen Lancaster** was the previous Chief of NRCS. ■



**C**hris Mather is the Director of the Office of Communications.

Before joining USDA, from December 2008 until her appointment to this position Mather served as a spokesperson for the Presidential Inaugural Committee. From August to November 2008 she was the Press Secretary for **Jill Biden** on the "Obama for America" presidential campaign.

Mather served from 2007-08 as the Political Director at "Change to Win" which is a Washington, DC-based labor federation. From 2005-07 she was Vice President of Communications at the American Trial Lawyers Association. She served as a Press Secretary for the Democratic National Committee during 2004. Prior to that she worked on several congressional campaigns and worked either in Washington, DC or in Chicago for such organizations as NARAL Pro-Choice America, Planned Parenthood, and the American Nurses Association.

**Chris Connelly**, the previous Director of OC, is now the Director of Communications and Research for the Global Intellectual Property Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, DC. ■



**R**on Vogel is the Associate Administrator for Special Nutrition Programs in the Food and Nutrition Service.

From 1992 until his selection for this position Vogel served as the Associate Deputy Administrator for Special Nutrition Programs in FNS, where he concentrated on 14 of the FNS nutrition assistance programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, as well as FNS's food distribution programs.

From 1987-92 Vogel served as Director of FNS's Supplemental Food Programs Division. During that time the number of participants in FNS's WIC program greatly expanded. He was Director from 1986-87 of FNS's [then] Program Information Division, responsible for the agency's financial information and

program data. From 1983-86 he worked as a Program Analyst in FNS's [then] Office of Regional Operations where he was the liaison for Special Nutrition Programs with the agency's seven regional offices. He began his federal career with FNS in 1980 as an Evaluation Specialist in the agency's [then] Office of Analysis and Evaluation in Washington, DC. From 1974-80 he worked in the private sector in the Washington, DC metropolitan area as an Evaluation Specialist for area consulting firms.

**Eric Steiner**, the previous Associate Administrator for Special Nutrition Programs in FNS, is now working as a Law Clerk in the Office of the General Counsel with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission in Washington, DC, while he is finishing his final year at George Mason University Law School in Arlington, VA. ■

The **USDA NEWS** is published by the Office of Communications, the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This employee news publication, which is prepared by, for, and about this Department's employees, is distributed to USDA's 106,100 full-time, part-time, and temporary federal employees and non-federal county employees, by order of the Secretary of Agriculture. Mailing address is Rm. 412-A Whitten Bldg.; OC, USDA; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; Washington, D.C. 20250-1300.

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While OO Program Analyst and CFC Co-coordinator **Teresa Maguire** (background, left) and OBPA Budget Coordinator **Mary Donovan** take mental notes on his approach, OBPA Program Analyst **Chris Nelson** (seated) gets psyched for his thumb-wrestling match with OBPA CFC Coordinator **Bryan Petit** (off-camera, limbering up). The event was one of many recent creative fund-raising activities by USDA employees in support of the 2008 Combined Federal Campaign. USDA headquarters and many field offices participated in the 2008 CFC through January 2009. OO Management Analyst and CFC Co-coordinator **Tracey King** noted that USDA employees in the Washington, DC metropolitan area raised over \$1.89 million for that campaign, and Departmental Administration CFC Coordinator **Lisa Faleski** added that DC-area employees increased their participation by 3 percent.—**PHOTO BY JANICE BARNES**



## Help us find

### Tevin Wells

Missing: **2-21-2009** From: **Orlando, FL**

D.O.B.: **1-25-1992** Sex: **Male**

Hair: **Black**

Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **5 ft. 9 in.**

Weight: **165 lbs.**

*If you have information, please call*

**1-800-843-5678**

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### ■ May 4–10

*Public Service Recognition Week*

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### ■ Month of May

*Asian Pacific American Heritage Month*

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 205-0175 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

### ■ Month of June

*National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month*

USDA headquarters and field offices

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